



**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
VA MIDWEST HEALTH CARE NETWORK
Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 23
Network Update
June 2010
www.visn23.va.gov**



**VA Announces New Hotline
for Homeless Veterans
1-877-4AID VET
1-877-424-3838**

The hotline of the new National Call Center for Homeless Veterans will provide homeless Veterans with caring, timely assistance and coordinated access to VA and community services. Family members, workers at community agencies and non-VA providers also may call the hotline at 1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838) to find out about the many programs and services available to assist homeless Veterans.

Well-trained expert responders will staff the hotline 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They join other responders who staff VA's Suicide Prevention Hotline. When they call, all Veterans will receive a brief suicide screening.

VA assistance is available for homeless Veterans who may have mental health issues, substance abuse, depression, traumatic brain injury, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The responders operating the new hotline will ensure Veterans receive the help they need and deserve.

The hotline, which began service on March 1, has received 1,846 calls. Call volume is expected to grow as awareness of the service increases. Last year, more than 92,000 homeless Veterans were served by VA's specialized homeless programs. For more information on the call center, go to:
<http://www1.va.gov/HOMELESS/NationalCallCenter.asp>.

Dr. Steven Julius Named Acting Network Director

The Department continues its search for a permanent Network Director. Ms. Cynthia Breyfogle, former Acting Network Director, left to accept the position of Medical Center Director at the VA Medical Center in Asheville, North Carolina. Dr. Steven Julius was appointed Acting Network Director upon her departure. Dr. Julius serves as the Network's Chief Medical Officer.

VAMC Names New Nurse Executive

After a long national search, it was announced in early May that Captain Helen V. Pearlman, NC, USN, will join Minneapolis VA Medical Center as Nurse Executive. She is expected to assume the role by September 1. Currently, she is assistant chief of staff, Navy Medicine West. She has previously served as commanding officer of the U.S. Naval Hospital in Sigonella, Italy.

Minneapolis VAMC's Parking Plans Moving Ahead

Plans are underway to improve the parking situation. An enclosed parking garage concept design is under review. The four-story garage will include at least 300 spaces intended for patient use. If all goes according to plans, construction could begin in spring of 2011. VAMC will lose about 150 surface spaces. However, a new surface lot under construction off 54th Avenue will accommodate about 380 spaces. That lot is expected to be completed this summer.

Network Telehealth Update

The telehealth programs in Network 23 are growing! Currently we have over 2400 veterans using home messaging equipment and we have had thousands of clinic visits with providers at remote locations. Did you know...Many VA medical centers can now take a picture of your eye and send the picture to Minneapolis where a trained eye specialist reviews it and makes recommendations to your primary care provider? Listed below are projects planned to improve access, reduce travel, and enhance quality.

- Teledermatology, Iowa City VAMC - skin assessments using pictures and remote viewing.
- Home Telehealth at CBOC's so your home monitoring is closer than ever.
- Mobile Teleretinal Imaging – allows for pictures of the eye to be taken remotely at CBOCs.
- Remote Pre-surgical care assessments will be available.
- Teleaudiology for hearing aid adjustments are now available at most sites.
- Home Telehealth services specifically for patients with kidney problems will soon be available.

These are just some of the projects we are working on. If you have questions or need more information contact your local VA medical center.

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New Scholarship for the Children of Fallen Service Members

The children of military personnel who died in the line of duty since September 11, 2001, can apply for an educational scholarship similar to the new Post-9/11 GI Bill. Benefits are retroactive to Aug. 1, 2009. The scholarship, which is administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs, is named after Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry, 28, a Texas native who died in Iraq in 2006 while disarming an explosive. He was survived by three young children. VA began accepting applications for the Fry scholarship on May 1, 2010. For more information or assistance applying, call toll-free 1-888-GIBILL-1 (1-888-442-4551), or visit the VA GI Bill Website at www.gibill.va.gov.

The VA estimates nearly 1,500 children will receive benefits under the Fry scholarship program in 2010. Recipients generally have 15 years to use their benefits, beginning on their 18th birthdays. Eligible children attending institutions of higher learning may receive payments to cover their tuition and fees up to the highest amounts charged to public, in-state students at undergraduate institutions in each state. A monthly housing allowance and stipend for books and supplies are also paid under this program. VA will begin paying benefits under the Fry scholarships on Aug. 1, 2010. Recipients are entitled to 36 months of benefits at the 100 percent level.

More information can be found at <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1892>

St. Cloud VAMC to Host Disabled Veterans Deer Hunt

The St. Cloud Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the Minnesota National Guard, Camp Ripley will host the 19th Annual Physically Disabled Veterans Deer Hunt October 5-7, 2010, at Camp Ripley in Little Falls. This special hunt is provided for physically disabled veterans who are either currently receiving outpatient care or are eligible to receive care at a VA Medical Center and cannot hunt during the regular firearms season. The Physically Disabled Veterans Deer Hunt is sponsored by the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and their respective Auxiliaries. Applications will be available June 21-July 16, 2010, through the VA's Voluntary Service Office, (320) 255-6365.

Serving Those Returning From Combat

The Network takes a proactive approach on outreach to returning service members. As of April 30, 2010, the Network enrolled a total of 38,868 returning service members. Of those, 23,033 received outpatient services; 931 were treated as inpatients; and 14,904 chose to enroll only. If you would like to discuss ideas on how we can better serve those returning from combat, please contact the OEF/OIF Coordinator at your local VA Medical Center. The following tables show the number of Combat Veterans enrolled in this Network and where they are receiving care.

Combat Veterans Enrolled in VISN 23 Cumulative thru April 30, 2010				
Location	National Guard	Reserve	Active Duty	Totals
Black Hills	1021	47	1359	2427
Central Iowa	1789	287	949	3025
Fargo	2312	194	924	3430
Iowa City	2591	596	630	3817
Minneapolis	6487	4031	2393	12911
NE/W Iowa	2791	1189	1599	5579
St. Cloud	2280	344	1403	4027
Sioux Falls	1255	197	2200	3652
VISN Total	20526	6885	11457	38868

Combat Veterans Care in VISN 23 Cumulative thru April 30, 2010				
Location	Outpatient	Inpatient	Enrolled	Total
Black Hills	2043	264	120	2427
Central Iowa	1820	26	1179	3025
Fargo	1596	23	1811	3430
Iowa City	2869	50	898	3817
Minneapolis	4482	253	8176	12911
NE/W Iowa	3301	49	2229	5579
St. Cloud	3858	136	33	4027
Sioux Falls	3064	130	33	4027
VISN Totals	23033	931	14904	38868

Veterans Travel Benefits Brochure is Now Available Online.

The new travel brochure provides information on travel benefits and reimbursement thresholds. Veterans may be eligible for mileage reimbursement or special mode transport in association with obtaining VA health care if they are:

- Service-connected (SC) 30 percent or more
- Traveling for treatment of a SC condition
- Receive a VA pension, or have income not exceeding the maximum annual VA pension rate
- Traveling for a scheduled compensation & pension examination

Veterans may be eligible for Special Mode Transportation (ambulance, wheelchair, van, etc.) if the medical condition requires an ambulance or a specially equipped van as determined by a VA clinician, you meet one of the eligibility criteria listed above, and the travel is pre-authorized (authorization is not required for emergencies if a delay would be hazardous to life or health). *For more information call the Health Resource Center (HRC) with questions at*

1-877-222-VETS (8387). To view the brochure log on at: <http://vaww1.va.gov/CBO/cbo/docs/trvlbrochuremay10.pdf>



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New Software Will Improve Billing Claims Processing

VISN 23 is implementing a new software program called FBCS for processing claims for VA paid care Veterans receive in the community (Fee Basis). The new software being implemented at all facilities in the network will enable efficient and timely claims processing, as well as improved access to Fee Basis claim status information for customer service inquiries.

What's New on My HealtheVet

An on-line tool called [Considering Professional Help](#) is now available on My HealtheVet. The tool was created by My HealtheVet and the National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). There are five common concerns that may stop Veterans from getting mental health help. This tool shows Veterans what to look for and where to find help. They can learn the benefits of getting mental health support from health care providers, social workers, mental health staff, clergy, or other counselors. Responses are confidential. You do not need to be registered with My HealtheVet to use this tool. Go to <http://www.myhealth.va.gov/> home page for more information, click the red Research Health tab and select the blue Mental Health tab. My HealtheVet also offers four other free Screening tools under the [Mental Health](#) section. These tools are brief and confidential. Only the Veteran will see the results of the screening tools. The Veteran can choose to print a copy of the results for their own records or to give to their health care provider or a mental health professional. The four screening tools include: [Alcohol Use](#), [Depression](#), [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\)](#), and [Substance Abuse](#)

VA Center For Women Veterans

The VA Center for Women Veterans was established by Congress in November 1994 by P L 103-446 to oversee Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs for women Veterans. The Director, Center for Women Veterans, acts as the primary advisor to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on all matters related to policies, legislation, programs, issues, and initiatives affecting women Veterans. The mission of the VA Center for Women Veterans is to ensure:

- ♦ Women Veterans receive benefits and services on par with male Veterans.
- ♦ VA programs are responsive to gender-specific needs of women Veterans.
- ♦ Outreach is performed to improve women Veterans' awareness of services, benefits, and eligibility criteria.
- ♦ Women Veterans are treated with dignity and respect.

For information on benefits and services specifically designed for women Veterans, contact the Women Veterans Program Coordinator at your local VA medical center.

VA Launches HER STORY Campaign

The "Her Story" campaign recognizes the important contributions women Veterans have made in our lives and in the success of our Nation. To commemorate these lasting and profound contributions women Veterans have made over the course of our Nation's history, VA will celebrate the accomplishments of VA women Veteran employees with "Her Story." The goal of "Her Story" is to encourage VA offices and field facilities to actively acknowledge and honor the service of women Veterans. To learn more about the VA Center for Women Veterans and HER STORY campaign log on at <http://www1.va.gov/womenvet/>

DID YOU KNOW as a result of the progress of the 1990s, women are now excluded from only 9 percent of Army roles—although that figure represents nearly 30 percent of active-duty positions. Army women cannot be assigned to the following occupational fields: infantry, armor, special forces, cannon field artillery and multiple launch rocket artillery. Also closed to women are: Ranger units at the regiment level and below, ground surveillance radar platoons, combat engineer line companies, and short range defense artillery units. In the Air Force, 99 percent of all occupations are open to women. Navy women are only excluded from submarine crews and SEAL teams, special boat unit crews and support positions with the Marine Corps ground combat units. The Marine Corps has opened 92 percent of its occupational fields to women, however 38 percent of positions are closed to women. Closed occupational fields include infantry, tank and assault amphibian vehicles and artillery. All Coast Guard occupations and positions are open to women. (Source: Women In Military Service For America archives)

For More information, call the Network Office at (612) 725-1968 or
Log on at www.visn23.va.gov or email sharyl.schaepe@va.gov